

For Immediate Release, April 18, 2016

Contact:

Rebecca Sobel, WildEarth Guardians, (505) 216-6826

Mariel Nanasi, New Energy Economy, (505) 989-7262

Susan Gordon, Multicultural Alliance for a Safe Environment, (505) 577-8438

Eleanor Bravo, Food & Water Watch, (505) 730-8474

Taylor McKinnon, Center for Biological Diversity, (801) 300-2414

Ruth Breech, Rainforest Action Network, (415) 238-1766

Marissa Knodel, Friends of the Earth, (202) 222-0729

Groups to Obama: Keep It in the Ground, Cancel Fossil Fuel Auction in Santa Fe

SANTA FE, *N.M.*— Local, regional and national organizations sent a letter to President Obama today calling on him to keep federal fossil fuels in the ground and cancel the Bureau of Land Management’s federal oil and gas auction slated for April 20 in Santa Fe, N.M., owing to concerns over runaway greenhouse gas pollution and the climate crisis. The Bureau will be auctioning more than 2,300 acres of publicly owned oil and gas in Kansas and Oklahoma to private fossil fuel corporations on Wednesday. The agency authorized this sale despite the worsening climate crisis; administrative challenges to the auction by the Center for Biological Diversity, Sierra Club and others [reduced its size](#) from 36,000 to 2,300 acres.

“Days away from signing the Paris climate agreements, the president says he’s committed to climate leadership,” said Rebecca Sobel, senior climate and energy campaigner for WildEarth Guardians. “But the hypocrisy is stark — we can’t avert climate catastrophe while BLM continues to auction off our public lands for fracking. The time for ‘all of the above’ energy policies are over.”

“We can’t talk the talk of addressing climate change and preserving the planet for our children and lease federal land to the polluters,” said Mariel Nanasi, executive director of New Energy Economy.

“We’re out of time for delays, half-measures and ‘all of the above’ energy policies,” said Taylor McKinnon with the Center. “Limiting temperature rise to below 1.5 degrees Celsius, as the Paris climate agreement aims, requires keeping fossil fuels in the ground. President Obama should do that now by stopping new fossil fuel leases on public lands and oceans.”

“Fossil fuel companies have made millions off public land leases while wrecking the environment, harming people’s health, violating Indigenous rights, and passing off massive clean-up costs to taxpayers. It’s time for President Obama and the BLM to heed the people’s call to keep it in the ground, end the corporate giveaway, and cancel these lands sales forever.” said Ruth Breech, senior campaigner for Rainforest Action Network.

Today's letter states that the sale perpetuates a conflict between the Obama administration's climate goals and its "all of the above" energy policy by leasing federal fossil fuels that should be considered "unburnable" in the context of global carbon budgets. It notes that climate science makes clear that a majority of fossil fuels must be kept in the ground to avoid dangerous warming and the impacts of drought, severe wildfires, extreme weather events and global sea-level rise. Federal fossil fuels — those that the president directly controls — should be the first taken off the table.

"President Obama's climate legacy depends on keeping fossil fuels in the ground," said Marissa Knodel with Friends of the Earth. "With more fossil fuels leased than can be burned to avoid climate catastrophe, President Obama must put a stop to all new lease sales of public fossil fuels."

In September more than 400 organizations and leaders working on the "Keep It in the Ground" campaign [delivered a letter](#) calling on President Obama to end new federal fossil fuel leasing following reports that doing so would keep up to 450 billion tons of greenhouse gas pollution in the ground, and that the president has the legal authority to do so now, without Congress.

"The American Southwest will be among the regions hardest hit by climate change," said Eleanor Bravo of Food & Water Watch. "Continuing to sell off fossil fuels from beneath our federal lands is no better than outright denial of climate science. Let's put an end to drilling, fracking and mining for publicly owned fossil fuels, and remake energy systems in the southwest based on clean, renewable solutions."

"The Multicultural Alliance for a Safe Environment is a network of groups in the Grants mining district representing communities directly impacted by uranium mining," said Susan Gordon with the Alliance. "We stand with other groups today to support keeping all dirty fuels in the ground — oil, gas, coal and uranium — and we support a rapid transition to clean, renewable non-nuclear energy."

Groups calling on Obama to withdraw this week's sale include Center for Biological Diversity, Food & Water Watch, Friends of the Earth, Interfaith Worker Justice – NM, New Energy Economy, New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light, Multicultural Alliance for a Safe Environment (MASE), Rainforest Action Network, Sierra Club and WildEarth Guardians.

Hundreds of climate activists plan to rally outside of the Santa Fe auction at 8:30 on Wednesday should it go forward. Over the past several months, the "Keep It in the Ground" movement has resulted in increasingly large public protests at federal fossil fuel auctions in Alaska, Utah, Nevada, Wisconsin, Wyoming, Colorado and Louisiana; several have been halted due to agencies' inability to accommodate crowds.

To download a copy of today's letter, click [here](#).

To view a media advisory for Wednesday's Santa Fe rally, click [here](#).

Background

The American public owns nearly 650 million acres of federal public land, and more than 1.7 billion acres of Outer Continental Shelf — and the fossil fuels beneath them. Some 67 million acres of U.S. public lands are already leased to dirty fossil fuel industries, an area 55 times larger than Grand Canyon National Park containing up to 43 billion tons of potential greenhouse gas pollution. Nearly one quarter of all U.S. climate pollution already comes from burning fossil fuels from public lands. Remaining federal oil, gas, coal, oil shale and tar sands that have not been leased to industry contain up to 450 billion additional tons of potential greenhouse gas pollution.

In September more than 400 organizations called on President Obama to end federal fossil fuel leasing. In November Sens. Merkley (D-Ore.), Sanders (D-Vt.) and others introduced the “Keep It in the Ground Act,” legislation to end new federal fossil fuel leases and cancel non-producing federal fossil fuel leases. Last month the Obama administration placed a moratorium on federal coal leasing while the Department of the Interior studies its impacts on taxpayers and the planet. Since November 2015 in response to “Keep It in the Ground” protests, the BLM has postponed oil and gas leasing auctions in Utah, Montana, Wyoming and Washington, D.C.

Download the September [“Keep It in the Ground”](#) letter to President Obama.

Download *Grounded: [The President’s Power to Fight Climate Change, Protect Public Lands by Keeping Publicly Owned Fossil Fuels in the Ground](#)* (this report details the legal authorities with which a president can halt new federal fossil fuel leases).

Download [The Potential Greenhouse Gas Emissions of U.S. Federal Fossil Fuels](#) (this report quantifies the volume and potential greenhouse gas emissions of remaining federal fossil fuels).

Download [The Potential Greenhouse Gas Emissions](#) fact sheet.

Download [Public Lands, Private Profits](#) (this report details the corporations profiting from climate-destroying fossil fuel extraction on public lands).

Download WildEarth Guardians’ [formal petition](#) calling on the Department of the Interior to study for the first time ever the climate impacts of the federal oil and gas leasing program and to place a moratorium on new leasing until completed that study is completed.

Download the Center for Biological Diversity’s [formal petition](#) calling on the Obama administration to halt all new offshore fossil fuel leasing.